









# STRICTURES

ON

DR. MARSH'S

“ COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE CHURCHES OF  
ENGLAND AND ROME.”

---

BY THE REV. JOHN LINGARD.

---

Τῆς τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείας τὴν γνῶσιν ἐπὶ πᾶσαν κατηγγέλλον (οἱ Ἀποστολοὶ)  
τὴν οἰκουμενὴν, σπουδῆς τῆς περὶ λογογραφεῖν μικρὰν ποιούμενοι φροντίδα· καὶ τῷτ'  
ἐπαρῶν αὐτὴ μείζονα καὶ ὅπερ ἀνθρώπων ἐξοπηρετῶμενοι διακινῶν.

Euseb. Hist. Eccles. l. iii. c. 24.

---

LONDON :

Printed by J. F. Dove, St. John's Square,

FOR JOSEPH BOOKER, 61, NEW BOND STREET ;

SOLD ALSO BY KEATINGS AND CO. DUKE STREET,  
GROSVENOR SQUARE.

---

1815.

# STRICTIONS

DR. MARSH

COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE CHURCHES OF  
ENGLAND AND IRELAND

BY THE REV. JOHN MARSH

THE REV. JOHN MARSH, D.D.,  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,  
AND OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND,  
HAS BEEN ASSISTED BY  
THE REV. JOHN MARSH, D.D.,  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,  
AND OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

LONDON:

Printed by J. G. ALLEN, at the  
University Press, in Strand Street,  
near the Church of St. Martin in the  
Vineyard.

# STRICTURES, &c.

---

## CHAPTER I.

The object of the “Comparative View of the Two Churches of England and Rome.”—Dr. Marsh’s opinion of scripture and tradition.—His reasoning examined.—His charges against Bossuet.—His explanation of 2 Thess. ii. 15.—His opinion of the instability of tradition,—and of the difficulty of knowing it, when we find it,—refuted.

---

**T**HOUGH it may be fairly presumed that, in the controversy between the church of Rome and the modern church of England, every important argument has long since been pre-occupied and exhausted; yet new advocates are daily brought forward, who claim in their turn the attention of the public, and present the old matter belonging to their predecessors under a new, and sometimes a more engaging form. Among these may be numbered a scholar of great biblical celebrity, the Margaret-professor of divinity in the university of Cambridge. If

Dr. Marsh, by proposing to distribute the Book of Common Prayer with the Bible, was thought to betray a secret learning to the arbitrary principles of popery: his "Comparative View of the Churches of England and Rome," must completely wipe away the injurious imputation. In this long and laboured performance, he undertakes to examine the doctrine and policy of the two churches; 1st, as to the foundation of their respective creeds; 2d, as to the establishment of church ceremonies; and 3d, as to the exercise of church authority. On all these points he professes to shew, as it was meet he should, that the church of England acts on rational, tolerant, and scriptural grounds, while the conduct of the church of Rome has been repugnant to the inspired word of God, and to the natural liberty of man.

As the writer of these pages has not the inclination, so neither has he the leisure, to discuss this variety of subjects. Of the three parts into which the "Comparative View" has been divided, he wishes to confine himself to the first, the ground work of the other two. Nor would he even notice that, did he not feel anxious to direct the attention of Dr. Marsh and his associates, to a question, which has frequently been offered to their consideration; but, by some fatality, has almost always escaped



their memory. In examining the sources from which the two churches profess to derive their respective creeds, occasion will be offered to inquire, whether the reformers, by rejecting the authority of tradition, have not in effect destroyed the authority of scripture, taken away the security of religious belief, and undermined the very foundations of Christianity. This, certainly, is a subject not undeserving of attention.

The three first chapters of the "Comparative View," consist of preliminary matter, of definitions and quotations. These, with much parade of research, are spread over more than fifty pages; while the information which they convey, might have been comprised in less than fifty lines. We are successively led to the council of Trent, to Bellarmine, and Delahogue, on the one side, and to the articles and homilies of the church of England on the other: from the first we are taught, what every reader knew before, that the church of Rome admits the authority of both scripture and tradition; from the latter, what is equally well ascertained, that the church of England professes to admit the authority of scripture only, and to reject the authority of tradition. The writer of these sheets will not presume to lay a tax equally heavy and unnecessary on the

patience of his readers. He will therefore dismiss the introductory chapters of Dr. Marsh with a single observation, that Catholics, though they admit both scripture and tradition, do not consider them as independent sources of doctrine. They revere them both indeed, because both emanate from the same holy spirit. But they know, and experience has fully proved it, that the written word is of itself a dead letter, unable to explain its own meaning; that it may be made to speak any language, which suits the caprice or the convenience of its readers; and that it has been profanely wrested by innovators and fanatics, to support doctrines the most impious and contradictory. If then the scripture be a rule of faith, they contend that, to be securely so, it must be expounded according to the unwritten word, of which, no less than of the written word, the church of God has been appointed "the witness and the keeper" by its divine founder.

In his fourth chapter, Dr. Marsh enters on the real merits of the question. Is the scripture alone the rule of our faith, as is taught by the church of England; or are we to add tradition to the scripture, as is taught by the church of Rome? There is no point in the controversy between the two churches which involves greater interests, or demands more

dispassionate inquiry. If it can be shewn, that tradition, or the unwritten word, has no authority, then will the church of England have an equal chance with any other reformed church, of being in the right: if it cannot, then will they *all* be necessarily in the wrong. On this question, therefore, Dr. Marsh shall express his sentiments in his own words. The extract will appear long; but the apology for its length will be found in the importance of the subject. Had his reasoning been abridged, a suspicion might have arisen, that it had been misrepresented.

“The inquiry,” says he, “which we are about to institute, will be conducted in the most intelligible manner, by making Bossuet’s chapter upon scripture and tradition, the *basis* of that inquiry. And no Romanist can object to it, as Bossuet is universally holden by them in the highest estimation. In that chapter, which is the seventeenth in his ‘Exposition of the Catholic Faith,’ says Bossuet, ‘Jesus Christ ‘having laid the foundation of his church by ‘preaching, the *unwritten* word was consequently the *first* rule of Christianity; and ‘when the writings of the New Testament were ‘*added* to it, its authority was not *forfeited* on ‘that account, which makes us receive with ‘equal veneration, all that has been taught by

‘the apostles, whether in *writing* or by word of *mouth*, which St. Paul expressly recommends to the Thessalonians.’ Here no one will deny that Jesus Christ laid the foundation of his church by preaching. Nor can we *deny* that the unwritten word was the *first rule* of Christianity. As nothing was recorded, at least to our knowledge, during the life of our Saviour, the doctrines which he taught were, during *that period*, so many *divine traditions*. And divine traditions they *remained*, till they were recorded in the *gospels*. Again, as several years probably elapsed after the *apostles* had begun to teach under the guidance of the holy spirit, before they committed their doctrines to *writing*, the doctrines which they taught during *that period* were so many *apostolical traditions*. And apostolical traditions they *remained*, till they were recorded in the apostolical *epistles*. We may safely admit, therefore, that tradition, or the unwritten word, was the *first rule* of Christianity. The argument proceeds, that when the writings of the New Testament were *added* to it, its authority was not *forfeited* on that account. Now this argument, which is employed by other writers on the same subject, is supposed to *establish* the authority ascribed by the church of Rome to the unwritten word. For since it cannot be



denied, that this was the *first rule* of Christianity, the authority which is acknowledged to have been *then* due to it, does not *immediately* appear to have been actually *cancelled* by the circumstance that another authority was placed by the side of it. Yet, if we examine the argument a little *more closely*, we shall find that it carries with it its own confutation. For it secretly *implies* a point to be proved, and is therefore nothing better than a *petitio principii*. When they say, that the writings of the New Testament were *added* to the unwritten word, the very term ‘added,’ implies such a difference between the things themselves, as *tacitly* affords a foundation for their future superstructure. On the supposition, that the whole of the unwritten word was afterwards recorded in the New Testament, there would be an *absurdity* in saying that the New Testament was *added* to it. This *very term*, therefore, artfully implies, that a *part* at least of God’s word was *not* recorded in the New Testament. But this is a point which the Romanists cannot take for *granted*, when they are arguing with those who invariably *deny* it. At the very dawn of the Reformation, both Luther and Melancthon rejected *tradition* as a rule of faith, because they were convinced that the *whole* of

God's word was contained in the scripture or the *written* word."\*

What impression the perusal of this passage may have made on the reader's mind, I will not pretend to divine. For myself, I will own, that I was disappointed. From the solemnity of the introduction I had been led to expect some very cogent argument, some express declaration from the word of God, that the scripture, to the exclusion of tradition, was the *only* rule of Christianity. Such at least would have been the manner in which a writer, adopting the principles of the "Comparative View," and confident in their accuracy, would naturally have proceeded. If Dr. Marsh has not done so, because he was conscious that he could not, that consciousness alone might have taught him to doubt the truth of his own doctrine. What then has he done? Why, nothing to the purpose. Instead of proving his own assertion by argument, he has trifled away his time in an impotent attempt to shew, that a passage, which he has selected from Bossuet, is a *petitio principii*. Now, were this to be allowed him, still we should not be advanced one step in the controversy. A logical error in an advocate

\* Comparative View, p. 61—63.

is not a decisive proof of the badness of his cause. Dr. Marsh must adduce some positive argument in his own favour, before he can demonstrate that scripture alone is the rule of Christian faith. But—

1st. Though he is at liberty to select an extract from Bossuet's "Exposition," as the basis of his inquiry, yet let me ask by what right he reasons on the supposition that these half a dozen lines contain, not only the doctrine, but also the arguments of Catholics. He must know the difference between a mere statement, and a vindication, of doctrine; nor can he be ignorant that the chapter in Bossuet is of the former, and not of the latter description.

2d. If Dr. Marsh really flatters himself that he has discovered a *petitio principii* in the words of Bossuet, I envy him ~~him~~ not his powers of discernment. There is no "artful implication of a point to be proved," in the passage alluded to. The Bishop of Meaux did, indeed, say, that the written had been *joined* to the unwritten word. "*Lorsque les écritures du nouveau testament y ont été jointes.*" But what else could he say? He was speaking, not of the *nature* of the doctrine, but of the vehicles by which it was conveyed, the unwritten and the written word. Dr. Marsh himself acknowledges that the unwrit-

ten word was the first rule: of course the second rule must have followed the first. Unless then he pretend, that, at the publication of the scriptures, all recollection of unwritten doctrine was effaced from the minds of the disciples, he also must say that the one was “added” or “joined” to the other.

3d. But since Protestants maintain that the whole of the unwritten is contained in the written word, how, it is asked, can Catholics take the contrary for granted? In reasoning with an adversary, you cannot, indeed, argue from what he denies, as if he had already admitted it: but, in stating your own opinions, as Bossuet did, it is not only your right, it is your duty to state them fairly, whether your adversary admit them or not. But here let me ask, with whom on the present subject the onus probandi lies, with the Catholic or the Protestant? The unwritten word, it is agreed, on all hands, was originally in possession of authority.—Luther, and Melancthon, and Dr. Marsh, come forward; they assert, that its authority was cancelled on the appearance of the written word; and assign, as a reason, that the whole of the former was recorded in the latter. But are we to believe this to be the fact, on their unsupported assertion? Is it not for them to adduce their proofs? Let them do so. Till



they have done it, the unwritten word, according to the laws of reasoning, may be supposed in full possession of its original authority.

Perhaps the reader will expect, that, after this preliminary skirmish, Dr. Marsh will boldly come forward, and meet his enemy with all his force. No: whatever strength he has, it is carefully concealed. Bossuet, in his statement, had alluded to 2 Thessalonians, ii. 15, and this has furnished Dr. Marsh with an opportunity of reading us a long lecture, in which he interprets the passage, and then infers that it does not prove, what it was designed to prove.\* The interpretation I shall notice presently; the inference is founded on misapprehension. Supposing that the testimony of St. Paul was adduced to prove the *present* existence of apostolical traditions, he asks how it can be shewn that the traditions of which the apostle spoke, had not been already, or were not afterwards recorded in the other epistles. But the Bishop of Meaux did not assert that the traditions, of which the apostle spoke, are or are not in actual existence. That was another question. His object was only to shew, that St. Paul exacted the same submission to his doctrine, whether it were deli-

\* Comparative View, p. 64. 66.

vered by word of mouth, or were committed to writing, "Nous recevons avec une pareille veneration tout ce qui a été enseigne par les apôtres, soit par ecrit, soit de vive voix, selon que St. Paul même là expressément déclaré, 2 Thess. ii. 15." And that he was borne out in this opinion by the text itself, will be evident to the dispassionate reader. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle."

If then I notice the interpretation, which is given of this passage in the "Comparative View," it is not to vindicate Bossuet, but to call the attention of the reader to the freedoms which the reformed divines are accustomed to use with their only rule of faith, and the temerity with which they substitute their own conjectures for the infallible word of the Almighty. That the command of "holding traditions," should sound rather gratingly to an orthodox ear, is natural enough: and it would certainly be convenient to exchange it for an expression, which savours less of the corruption of popery. With this view Dr. Marsh deserts the authorized version of his church, and has recourse to the Greek text. He there finds the word *παράδοσις*, and taking it with him, goes in search of some passage, in which it may

signify any other thing than the tradition of doctrine. Fortunately, he discovers, that in 2 Thess. iii. 6, it regards discipline, and may be translated *direction*. The question is instantly decided: whatever be the object or the language of the apostle in the contested passage, παραδοσις shall there also mean *direction*, and the heterodox phrase of "holding traditions" shall no longer offend the eye of Protestant readers.\* Not that I mean to accuse

\* Comp. View, 63—66. Dr. M. appears to set a high value on this interpretation. He afterwards (p. 120) refers to it as an instance of the advantage to be derived from appealing to the original text, a privilege of which he pretends the Catholic divines have been deprived by the council of Trent. Of the value of his interpretation, the reader must be the judge: as to the practice of appealing to the originals, Catholic divines employ it as well as Protestant. That it was prohibited by the second decree, made at the fourth session of the council of Trent, is a fiction of ancient date, the repetition of which, by Dr. Marsh, cannot but excite surprise. The decree neither mentions the originals expressly, nor even alludes to them remotely. If the sixth of the English articles "allows by its very silence an appeal to the inspired originals, (Compar. View, p. 119)," it might equally be inferred from the silence of the council, that it also allowed an appeal to the same originals. Its provisions are confined exclusively to translations, and those too published in the Latin language previously to the issuing of the decree: "Ex omnibus Latinis editionibus, quæ circumferuntur, sacrorum librorum, quænam pro authentica habenda sit." Out of

Dr. Marsh of any intention to misinterpret the scripture: but if he analyze the workings of

---

these translations, it determines which for the future shall be deemed *authentic*, that is, approved by competent authority. This is exactly what the church of England has done in respect to the many English translations. That church has chosen a new, for *its* authorized, version. The Catholic church, being an old church, chose an old version for the same purpose: "Vetus et vulgata editio, quæ longo tot sæculorum usu in ipsa ecclesia probata est." And there was much fairness in it. A new version (so powerful is the influence of system over the judgment) might be made, even unintentionally, to favour new opinions; but a version, published centuries before the rise of the controversy between the church of Rome and the reformers, could not be suspected of any such bias. It was therefore decreed, that the Latin vulgate should be taken for the authorized version of the Catholic church, in public lectures, disputations, sermons, and expositions; that is, on all public occasions in which an authorized version is necessary: "In publicis lectionibus, disputationibus, prædicationibus et expositionibus pro authentica habeatur:" and that no one should, on any pretence, presume to reject it: "Et ut nemo illam rejicere quovis prætextu audeat vel præsumat." Now, Dr. Marsh, in translating this last passage, has contrived, unintentionally, no doubt, by the insertion of an unauthorized word, to convert the prohibition of rejecting the Latin vulgate in general into a prohibition of rejecting any particular passage in it. "Let no one presume to reject the *decision* of the Latin vulgate, under any pretence whatsoever," (p. 119). A very slight acquaintance with Catholic literature will shew, that such is not the meaning of the degree. Many passages in the vul-



his own mind, he will, I suspect, discover, that his new explication originated in a secret wish to get rid of that impudent word, *tradition*. Now, reader, if you think it worth your while to peruse the second and third chapters of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, you will soon be enabled to judge of the merit of this very important discovery. Παράδοσις signifies *direction* in the third chapter. Granted: but must it then signify direction in every other passage? If the apostle were speaking, not of discipline, but of doctrine, would it not then mean the *tradition of doctrine*? Now, this is exactly the present case. The two chapters treat of quite different matters. The second regards nothing but doctrine; the third is confined to discipline. In the second, St. Paul warns his disciples against *false teachers*: "Let no man deceive you by any means." In the third, against men of covetous and disorderly *conduct*: "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly:" in the second,

---

gate have been since corrected by authority: Catholic divines have repeatedly translated the originals: they are in the constant habit of recurring to the originals for the improvement and correction of passages in the vulgate, and in this country, Catholic controvertists seldom quote from the vulgate at all; they generally quote from the version of the English church,

after reminding them of what he had *said* to them on former occasions, he adds, “therefore stand fast, and *hold the traditions* (παραιδοσεις) which ye have been *taught*, whether by *word* or our epistle:” in the third, after calling to their recollection his own *conduct* among them, he adds, that the man who does otherwise, “walketh not after the *direction* (παραιδοσιν) which he received from us.” The same distinction is clearly pointed out by the precision of the apostle’s language. In one chapter he speaks of *holding traditions*; in the other, of *walking after directions*: in the one, of traditions which the Thessalonians had been *taught*; in the other, of *direction* said to have been *received*. To me then nothing can appear more plain, than that in the first passage we are to understand the tradition of doctrine, and that to expound it by the second, is to pervert the real meaning of the apostle.

Having explained this passage from the second Epistle to the Thessalonians in an orthodox sense, Dr. Marsh proceeds to favour us with his conjectures on the subject of tradition. He thinks it “extremely improbable that an all-wise Providence, imparting a new revelation to mankind, would suffer any *doctrine* or article of *faith* to be transmitted to posterity by so precarious a vehicle as that of *oral tra-*

*dition.* Articles of faith are objects only of *inward* sense, and must *unavoidably*, when transmitted only from *mouth to mouth*, undergo, *in a very short period*, material alterations.”\*

It may be sufficient to reply, that conjecture is a very unsafe foundation for a system of religious belief. We are but incompetent judges what measures it is probable or improbable, that the wisdom of the Almighty would pursue. Dr. Marsh founds his objection on the *unavoidable* alteration, which traditionary doctrine *must* undergo. But is alteration unavoidable? Could Almighty Wisdom devise no means of preventing it? He has himself told us from Dr. Tomline, that “the general superintendence of the Holy Spirit prevented the writers of the scriptures from registering any material error.”† Could not the superintendence of the same Holy Spirit also prevent the great body of pastors from ever corrupting the unwritten word by any “material alteration?” Evidently it could: and what is more, if Catholics may be allowed, as well as Protestants, to understand the scriptures, it ought. For our blessed Lord had promised to Peter, that the gates of hell should not prevail against his church; and, when he sent the apostles to

\* Comparative View, p. 67.

† Illustration of the hypothesis, &c. p. 33.

teach all nations, had added, that he would be with them himself always, even unto the end of the world.\*

\* Matt. xvi. 18. xxviii. 20. Dr. Marsh has very candidly proved (p. 213), that the words in the first of these passages, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church," must mean, "Thou art *rock* by name, and shall be *rock* indeed: for on thee," &c. May I recommend this opinion of Dr. Marsh to the notice of the Bishop of St. David's, one of those who, as Dr. Marsh observes, "have taken such unsuccessful pains to shew, that our Saviour, under the word *rock*, did not understand *St. Peter*." See a work by the Bishop of St. David's, intitled, "Christ, and not Peter, the rock;" and an answer to it, under the title of "Examination of certain Opinions advanced by the Right Rev. Dr. Burgess," &c. But is it not singular, that the agitation of the Catholic Question should have renewed a controversy, which the good sense of Protestant writers had long ago abandoned? Many impotent attempts have lately been made to call in question the fact of St. Peter having ever been at Rome. Now, how does the case stand? On the one side we are told, that neither St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, nor St. Paul in his Epistles, ever mention St. Peter as residing at Rome. But this is merely a negative argument: and, to be of any weight, it should be shewn, 1st, that if St. Peter ever was at Rome, it must have been at the times alluded to in these writings; and 2d, if he were there *then*, that he must of necessity have been mentioned in them. On the other side, it is asserted, that every ancient writer, who has noticed the labours and death of St. Peter, has either expressly mentioned, or evidently supposed, his preaching at Rome; and that not one of them all has used an expression which can throw any doubt on the fact. How does Dr. Marsh get rid of such



To shew, however, the little reliance that can be placed on such conjectural reasoning,

---

authority? He owns that Irenæus says, the church of Rome was founded by the apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul: but then Irenæus also calls it a most ancient church, "*antiquissima ecclesia*." Now this epithet, he contends, "*directly contradicts* the account given in the Acts relative to the church of Jerusalem," (for St. Peter preached at Jerusalem long before he could visit Rome); of course, so "palpable a falsehood destroys the credit of Irenæus; and also of other writers, who, when they mentioned St. Peter as at Rome, "probably depended on his authority," (p. 208. 210). It is really painful to notice such reasoning. But Dr. Marsh himself informs us, that Clemens of Alexandria and Tertullian were contemporary with Irenæus. What then is their testimony? Clemens says, that the occasion of writing St. Mark's gospel, was "when St. Peter preached the word publicly in Rome." (Apud Eus. Hist. Eccl. l. vi. c. 14). Could he derive this information from the lying Irenæus? Irenæus gives a different account, (Id. v. 8). Tertullian says, that Peter was crucified at Rome. *Ista quam felix ecclesia, cui totam doctrinam apostoli cum sanguine suo profuderunt: ubi Petrus passioni dominicæ adæquatur; ubi Paulus, &c.* (De Præscrip. p. 215. Par. 1675). Was he also deceived by the lying Irenæus? But he relates particulars, which Irenæus has not mentioned. Origen was the scholar of Clemens. He tells us, that Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards. *Επι τελει εν Ρωμη γενομενος ανασκολοπισθη κατὰ κεφαλῆς.* (Tom. iii. in Gen. apud Euseb. l. iii. c. 1). Could Origen derive this information from Irenæus? But, perhaps, he also is undeserving of credit; for he has been guilty of the same "*palpable falsehood*." He has applied

I will, for a moment, suppose it to be well-founded. The consequence will be, that the writing of the scriptures has prevented the original doctrine of the unwritten word from undergoing any material alteration. For it would be like blasphemy to assert, that the wisdom of God had made choice of any measure totally inadequate to effect its purpose. Let us then put this conjecture to the test. The scriptures were intended to prevent any material alteration of the unwritten word. Have they done so? 1st. During eight centuries before the Reformation, the whole Christ-

---

the epithet "*most ancient*" to the church of Rome, which he was anxious to visit: *ευξαμενος την αρχαιοτατην Ρωμαιων εκκλησιαν ιδειν*. (Apud. Euseb. l. vi. c. 14). Ignatius of Antioch, at least, could not have been deceived by Irenæus, for he suffered before the close of the first century. Yet he evidently supposes Peter to have preached at Rome. Requesting a favour from the Romans, he says, he does not presume to command them as Peter and Paul did: for they were apostles. *Ουχ ως Πιερὸς καὶ Παῦλος διατασσομεν υμιν*. (Cotel. Pat. Apost. Tom. ii. p. 28). And Clemens, a still more ancient writer, though, as Dr. Marsh observes, he does not mention *where* St. Peter suffered, plainly gives us to understand, that it was at Rome. He writes a letter from Rome, mentions the examples of constancy lately given by the apostles, and then describes the sufferings and death, first of St. Peter, and next of St. Paul. The latter, it is admitted, suffered at Rome, so then did the former.

ian world was plunged in the most damnable idolatry and superstition. At least, Dr. Marsh will say so; for it is the doctrine of his church in its homilies. The fact then will be, that for eight hundred years the scriptures failed of producing the very effect for which they were written. 2d. Has the case been bettered since the Reformation? No: the belief of this principle, that the scriptures are the rule of faith, had divided its followers into numberless sects, has multiplied error, and has taken away religious certainty. That it has produced numberless sects, is evident from the history of the reformed churches: that it has multiplied error, is equally certain; for all these sects differ from each other on doctrinal grounds; and, consequently, since truth cannot be at variance with itself, they must among them teach a great variety of errors; and that it has taken away all religious certainty, will result from the want of any rule or authority to determine between them. Let us suppose, for example, that you have searched the scriptures for your own satisfaction; that, after a long and dispassionate inquiry, you have made your selection of one of the reformed creeds in preference to the rest. Still, what security can you enjoy? Other men, as sincere as yourself, blessed with equal talents, and not inferior

in judgment, have made a similar inquiry, and have come to a totally opposite result. What reason have you to believe that you alone are right, and that they are wrong? It is evident that, if the scriptures were written for no other purpose than to preserve the true knowledge of Christ's doctrine, they have not produced that effect. I will, therefore, presume to offer to Dr. Marsh's consideration, the extreme improbability, that an all-wise Providence, imparting a new revelation to mankind, should suffer its doctrines to be transmitted to posterity, by so treacherous a vehicle as a written document, subject to the contradictory interpretations of different readers, without any provision for the determination of its real meaning. To me it appears that this conjecture is not less worthy of his notice, than that which he himself has stated.

But where, it is asked, can be the use of apostolical traditions, "if we have no means of knowing them, when we find them."\* Evidently in that case they must be useless: and a similar reason has always induced me to believe, that in the reformed system the scriptures are of little use; because in that system there is not, as experience has shewn, any means of ascertaining with security, what is

\* Comparative View, p. 68.



the true sense of scripture. But Dr. Marsh is mistaken, if he think, as he seems to do, that, in order to discover the traditions of the apostles, it is necessary to travel through all the works of all the fathers.\* That, indeed, would be an arduous, an almost endless task: and, what is worse, as their writings, no less than the inspired writings, are liable to different interpretations, we should, perhaps, at the end of our labour, find ourselves as far from certainty of doctrine, as are at the present day the reformed churches, after having sought, during almost three centuries, the true doctrine of Christ in the scriptures. But Catholics are persuaded that there is a much shorter, and a more secure way. The thirty-nine articles teach, that “the church is a witness and a keeper of the written word:” Catholics believe that the church is also a witness and a keeper of the *unwritten* word: that God has appointed her to transmit both to suc-

\* On this subject I would direct the attention of the Protestant reader to a most useful and laborious compilation, under the title of “The Faith of Catholics confirmed by Scripture, and attested by the Fathers of the Five first Ages, of the Church. London, Booker, 1813.” The body of the work will supply him with testimonies from the more ancient writers: in the introduction he will find the Catholic doctrine, on tradition and church authority, explained with a perspicuity and elegance characteristic of its author.

ceeding generations; and that from her doctrine may be learned both the one and the other. This I am aware Dr. Marsh will be disposed to deny. He may perhaps term it a *petitio principii*. But it is sufficient, in this stage of the controversy, to point out the source from which the Catholic professes to receive the doctrines of the unwritten word. If my learned adversary think he can demonstrate that it is not the source appointed by Christ, he is at liberty to make the attempt.

I have now arrived at the conclusion of the fourth chapter of the “Comparative View,” which ought to have shewn, that the existence of apostolical traditions is imaginary, that the written contains the whole of the unwritten word, and that the scriptures, exclusively of tradition, form the only rule of Christian doctrine. Yet what is the sum of the reasoning comprised within it? Merely this; that Bossuet has taken a disputed point for granted, and has misapplied a text of scripture: that traditional doctrine, without the care of a superintending Providence, is liable to alteration, and that it would be a hopeless undertaking to collect the doctrines of the apostles from the writings of former ages. Of the accuracy of these assertions, and of their bearing on the present subject, the reader has been enabled

to judge from the foregoing reflexions: and I may be allowed to conclude by saying, that, if nothing better can be alledged in defence of the reformed, or in opposition to the Catholic rule of faith, the foundation of the church of England must, to use Dr. Marsh's expression,\* be formed not of solid, but of sandy materials.

\* Comparative View, p. 2.

## CHAPTER II.

There is no evidence to induce a belief that the written word was meant as the sole rule of Christian faith, to the exclusion of the unwritten word.—The scriptures nowhere describe themselves as such.—The commission of the apostles was not to write, but to preach.—The manner in which the New Testament is composed of occasional and unconnected tracts, shews that it was not designed by the apostles—nor by the Spirit of God—to be the only rule of faith.

---

THE reader will have observed, from the preceding chapter, that on one point both churches are agreed. They both acknowledge that the unwritten word was the original rule of Christianity. In what then do they disagree? In this: the church of England teaches, that the whole of the unwritten was recorded in the written word, and that the scripture from that moment became the only rule of faith: while the church of Rome, on the contrary, maintains, that the unwritten word was neither wholly recorded in the written word, nor at any time deprived of its authority. It is obvious that, on this point, the whole controversy respecting



tradition turns. If, at the very dawn of the Reformation, Luther and Melancthon rejected tradition as a rule of faith, it was on account of their "conviction, that the whole of God's word was contained in the scripture."\*

Now, on this very interesting question, it has pleased Dr. Marsh to assert the affirmative, but without adducing any one argument to support it. On other subjects he can be laboriously, nay tediously, diffuse: on this, which so particularly required his aid, he has been most vexatiously silent. It is much to be regretted. I should have been happy to know what so learned and acute an advocate could have advanced in defence of a doctrine, which to me appears incapable of defence: and it must have been a satisfaction to the Protestant reader to be convinced, that the first principle of his faith has not been assumed because it was convenient, but has been admitted because it was true. This, however, has been denied us both; and we must be content to receive the assertion on the authority of Dr. Marsh, and the conviction of Luther and Melancthon.

Unable, therefore, to combat arguments, which are withheld from my knowledge, I shall presume to offer my own view of the subject;

\* Comparative View, p. 63.

and shall attempt to prove the two following propositions:—1st, there is no evidence to induce a belief that the scriptures were intended as the sole rule of faith, to the exclusion of the unwritten word: 2nd, there is sufficient evidence to induce a belief of the contrary.

I am aware that, to the orthodox reader, these opinions may appear bold, and perhaps paradoxical. From his infancy he has in all probability been taught, that the scriptures contain the whole doctrine of Christ and his apostles, and that from them alone he is to derive the articles of his creed. This principle, it must be confessed, is at first sight very specious: it is moreover flattering to human pride: and it has been so often echoed and re-echoed by teachers and writers, that no one can be surprised, if it be generally admitted without any inquiry into the evidence on which it may be grounded. But when we consider the alarming consequences which have flowed from it; when we see it become the prolific parent of discordant creeds; when we behold it furnishing alike weapons to the Unitarian and Trinitarian, to the Baptist and Anabaptist, to the church of England and to the kirk of Scotland, in defence of their distinctive doctrines; when we observe, from what daily passes around us, that it has given the rein

to every species of fanaticism, and reduced religious belief to a mere matter of opinion, or rather of conjecture; we may surely be allowed to doubt, whether it possess a just title to that authority, which it has so long claimed and exercised. Can the *only* rule of Christian faith give birth to contradictory faiths? Can the path appointed to guide our steps to the truth, lead the sincere inquirer into error? I cannot believe it: and shall therefore solicit the attention of the reader to the following reflections:

1st, Let us suppose, that a written paper is put into our hands, with an intimation that it is an authentic instrument of immense importance, and containing instructions which must be implicitly obeyed. What is the conduct, which ordinary prudence would, in such a case, suggest? If it be not in our power to procure access to those, from whom the paper was originally derived, it will be our duty to discover, if possible, by a careful examination of the contents, whether it profess to be such a document as had been described. Now let us act in a similar manner with respect to the scriptures. Dr. Marsh steps forward with a book in his hand, which he pronounces to be the *only* rule of Christian faith. There was indeed, he acknowledges, an unwritten rule before it; but that, he also tells us, was cancelled, as

soon as this book was written to be substituted in its place. Whence however he derived this information, he does not think proper to disclose. I therefore take the book, I read it diligently from the beginning to the end; but am unable to discover in any part of it, such pretensions as Dr. Marsh has ascribed to it. No where does it profess to be the sole rule of Christianity:\* no where does it so much as hint that its own authority is to supersede the authority of the unwritten word. If Dr. Marsh be right in his recommendation, is not such an omission singular and inexplicable? Can we persuade ourselves that the spirit of God would have left us a book, which is to be the only rule of our belief, and yet have omitted to inform us of the circumstance? Or that the inspired writers should have compiled such a code of doctrine, without once intimating to their disciples the important use for which they intended it? Had they said: "You have hitherto been guided by oral instruction from us; but we must shortly descend into the grave, and an unwritten word must undergo many material alterations. We have therefore composed this book: it contains the whole of

\* Certainly I shall not be referred, as sometimes has been done, to John xx. 31, 2 Tim. iii. 15—17, and similar passages, which evidently are foreign from the purpose.



our doctrine; and we bequeath it to you to be the only rule of your faith after our departure." Had they said this, or any thing like this, the matter would have been clear. It would not have admitted of a moment's doubt. But of all this, not the faintest trace can be discovered in any of their writings. In the absence then of all internal evidence, on what ground are we to be justified in adopting Dr. Marsh's doctrine? Tradition contradicts it: scripture is silent. It cannot then be derived from the word of God: and, if it be not, it falsifies itself. For, in that case, it erects the whole fabric of religion on the authority of man, while it pretends, at the same time, to reject every doctrine which is not founded on the authority of God.

2d, Our blessed Redeemer, confined his preaching to Jerusalem and the neighbouring country: his apostles he appointed to be "witnesses unto him both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Now, among their more important duties in this situation, a Protestant must rank the composition of the scriptures of the New Testament. For without them, he knows that the testimony of the apostles would "unavoidably have undergone material alteration," and posterity would have been left

without any clue, by which they might come to the discovery of the truth. In the commission therefore, which Christ gave to his apostles, we may rationally expect to find an injunction to write the New Testament. Unfortunately it is a commission of a very different nature: a commission not to *write*, but to *preach*. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.”—“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them, &c., teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.”\* And it is observable that they themselves, whenever they speak of this commission, understand it not of writing, but of preaching. “They went forth,” adds St. Mark, “and *preached* every where.” “He commanded us to *preach*,” says St. Peter. “The gospel, which ye have heard, and which has been *preached* to every creature which is under heaven,” observes St. Paul, plainly alluding to the original words of our divine Saviour.† Of a commission to *write* a rule of faith, they never

\* Mark, xvi. 14, 15. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

† Mark, xvi. 20. Acts, x. 42. Col. i. 28.

make any mention. In like manner, when St. Paul refers to the commission which he received individually from Christ, he also describes it as a commission to *preach*. He says, that “ he was sent to *preach*; that *preaching* was committed unto him according to the commandment of God; that he was ordained a *preacher*, an apostle, and a teacher of the gentiles.”\* Of any commission to *write*, he also appears ignorant. Thus we have the commission given to the apostles to preach, and their own testimony that they understood it of preaching: we meet with no commission given them to write a rule of faith, nor do they ever make mention of any. What is more extraordinary, even when they give instructions to their fellow labourers, and intended successors in the ministry, when they point out the means by which the knowledge of Christianity is to be perpetuated after their deaths, they are still silent on the subject of this only rule of faith; they talk not of bible-societies, or of bible-distributors; they appear to know of no other vehicle than oral tradition. “ Hold fast,” says St. Paul to his disciple Timothy, “ the form of sound words which thou hast *heard* of me—and the things which thou hast *heard* of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou

\* 1 Cor. i. 17. 1 Tim. ii. 7. Tit. i. 3.

to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”\* To me all this appears, on Protestant principles, perfectly inexplicable. What can be the reason that the scripture should withhold from the scriptural religionist all information on this most interesting subject, the foundation of his faith here, and of his hopes hereafter? Christ gives a commission to his apostles, but says nothing of writing a rule of faith: the apostles often speak of this commission, but they also are silent respecting a written rule of faith: eight individuals are at last supposed to combine their labours, and write this rule; and yet not one of them ever thinks of hinting that the work, which they are compiling, is the rule of faith. Shall we attribute their silence to forgetfulness or oversight? But they were under the superintending influence of the Holy Spirit. A Catholic alone can solve the difficulty, and he will tell you, that they never mentioned a written rule of faith, because they did not know of any.

3d, When the founders of the modern church of England undertook to compose a rule of faith, they consulted together; they determined what points of doctrine should be deemed orthodox; they arranged them under thirty-nine distinct heads; and published them

\* 2 Tim. i. 13, ii. 2.



to the world in concise and perspicuous language. In all this they acted as sensible men should act. Their work was demonstrative of their object: the nature of the matter, and the order of its arrangement, shewed that it was designed to be a system of religious doctrine. But if, instead of the thirty-nine articles, they had given us four imperfect narratives of the origin of the Reformation, with an appendix, containing a few epistles of Luther, Melancthon, and Peter Martyr, would it ever have entered into the mind of any man to consider such a compilation as a rule of faith? Yet, would not this have been a counterpart of the New Testament, as far as the writings of uninspired individuals may be compared with those of the apostles? In the latter we meet with no distinct plan, no appearance of concert between the writers, no division of the subject, no code of doctrinal articles either in any one particular book, or in the whole collection; we find only four short and unconnected narratives of our Saviour's life, a history of the first publication of the gospel, and a few epistles by five of the apostles. Is there any thing in such a work, to persuade us that it was composed to be the only rule of our faith?

The New Testament (it is to it that Dr.

Marsh confines his remarks) may be divided into three parts. The first consists of the four gospels. But it should be observed, that if two of these were written by the apostles, St. Matthew and St. John, two also were written by men, who could have received no commission from Christ, as they were not converted till after his ascension into heaven. On what ground then these two gospels have been admitted into the rule of faith by those who reject tradition, I am at a loss to conceive. Supposing, however, that all four were written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, how are we to satisfy ourselves that in them is recorded the *whole* of our Saviour's doctrine? Dr. Marsh asserts the fact;\* but it is much easier to assert, than to prove. The information cannot be derived from the books themselves, which make no such professions; and, if it be derived from any other source, it is on that very account undeserving of credit.

Of the manner in which the three first gospels were composed, Dr. Marsh tells the following very ingenious, but at the same time very singular story: that there existed two original documents, written by somebody, and approved by the apostles: that of these one

\* Comparative View, p. 63.

was a narrative of the actions of our Saviour, the other a collection of his precepts, parables, and discourses: that as copies of the first were multiplied, persons inserted in them such additional information as they acquired, which additions were either accounts of facts not before recorded, or of circumstances regarding facts before accorded: that the three evangelists used three different copies of this document, which, with respect to the additions, partly agreed and partly disagreed: that St. Matthew and St. Luke each possessed a copy, but St. Mark did not possess a copy, of the second document: and that from these sources, with the accession of such information as they had gleaned by their own industry, they composed their respective gospels.\* With the truth of this hypothesis, I have no concern; but I will confidently appeal to the reader, whether it is probable, that tracts compiled in this manner, can form a full and perfect record of the doctrine delivered by our Saviour. Indeed, it is certain, from St. John's gospel, that they do not; for that gospel con-

\* Marsh's Origin of the Three First Gospels, p. 194—210. As the reader would not have understood Dr. Marsh's system of notation, I have been compelled to explain his meaning in my own words. I trust I have represented it fairly.

tains much original and important information, which is not to be found in them.—Perhaps, then, the work of St. John may supply the deficiency? The apostle himself warns us against such an inference: “And many other signs truly did Jesus, which are not written in this book.”—“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”\*

The next portion of the New Testament, is the Acts of the Apostles. This tract relates the manner in which the gospel was first preached, and the conversion and subsequent labours of St. Paul. Incidentally, it mentions some points of doctrine; but, to attempt to prove that it is not a rule of faith, would be to exhaust the patience, and insult the judgment, of the reader.

The last part comprises the epistles, with the Book of Revelations, and is declared by Dr. Marsh to be a full and faithful record of the *whole* doctrine of the apostles.† But, does the collection itself profess to be such a record? It neither asserts it, nor exhibits the most distant appearance of it. By whom were

\* John, xx. 30. xxi. 25.

† Comparative View, p. 62, 63.



the epistles written? Not by the whole college of the apostles. Seven of the number, either never wrote at all, or the parts of the rule of faith which they composed, perished long ago. The epistles were written by St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude. But it does not appear that these five wrote in virtue of any commission from the whole body, or in consequence of any agreement among themselves, or in pursuance of any general plan. When were the epistles written? Not about the same time, but at different periods during the long lapse of almost fifty years. The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is supposed to have been written in the year 49; the Epistles of St. John about the year 97.\* To whom are the epistles written? To a great variety of persons, scattered over the face of the civilized world, professing, indeed, the same religion, but probably ignorant of the conversion, or even the existence of each other. Four are addressed to Christians in general, six to private individuals, one to the converts in Italy, and one to those in Palestine; two to Grecians, three to Macedonians, one to all the churches of Asia Minor, three to the particular churches of Phrygia, Ionia, and Ga-

\* Cave, in Paulo et Joanne.



latia; and the Book of Revelations to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. On what subjects were the epistles written? Not on such as we might naturally expect in a code of religious doctrine, but on such as the passing events of the day offered to the writers. Thus a convert at Corinth had married the widow of his father. St. Paul writes an epistle for the correction of this, and of other abuses. One of his disciples had been left in Crete, to regulate the infant church of that island. The apostle gives him directions for his conduct. A fugitive slave had received baptism. St. Paul sends him back to his master, with a letter soliciting his pardon. St. John had heard of the faith and hospitality of Gaius. He writes to him a congratulatory epistle. False teachers had endeavoured to seduce the converts. St. Jude warns them of their danger, and exhorts them to persevere in the doctrine, which they had originally received. The same may be said of all the other epistles: they were occasional tracts called for by accidental occurrences. Let the reader only consider the want of concert among the writers, the different times at which they wrote, the different persons to whom they addressed their letters, and the different subjects which employed

their pens, and he will be convinced that, if the apostles really intended to leave a rule of faith for the instruction of their disciples and posterity, they pursued for this purpose, a method the most confused and extraordinary that ever entered into the mind of man. In my judgment, the only rational conclusion which can be drawn from the premises, is this : that several letters and tracts on religious subjects had been occasionally written by some of the apostles, and one or two of their immediate disciples; that after their deaths, such of these as had not perished, were collected into one body by the piety of the primitive Christians; and that the collection thus made has been transmitted to us from generation to generation, under the name of the New Testament.

4th. The divines, who so fiercely contend in support of this fundamental principle of Protestantism, have necessarily to make their choice between the two following suppositions. If the scriptures of the New Testament are the rule of Christian faith, they must have been intended as such, either by the writers themselves, or by the spirit of God, without the knowledge of the writers. Otherwise you erect them into a rule of faith by mere human invention, and thereby deprive them of divine authority. That the first of these two suppo-

sitions cannot be admitted, appears to me most evident, from the foregoing observations: the second, in my opinion, is liable to equal, if not to more formidable, objections.

1st. That the second supposition is in itself possible, will not be denied. Men are frequently unconscious instruments in the hands of the Almighty; and the pens of the apostles might have been so guided by a superintending Providence, that the result of their labours should have proved a complete rule of faith, though no such design had ever been entertained by the writers themselves. But, in that case, would not the scriptures have assumed a very different appearance from that which they now exhibit? Would they not, like the different codes of doctrine published by the reformed churches, have presented to the reader a full, clear, and succinct statement of the faith and practice, required of those for whose use they were written? But, as they are, they do quite the reverse. It is in vain that you look into them for such a statement: the articles of doctrine are scattered here and there, without any attention to order: their meaning is frequently hidden under the obscurity of the language: the advance of the sincere inquirer is repeatedly arrested by apparent contradictions: and it seldom happens, that any two

readers, after a patient and impartial investigation, agree in the same decision. To me it appears, that of all the possible forms under which a rule of faith could have been published to mankind, the New Testament is, as such, the most incongruous and confused. It is what no sensible man would ever have adopted: and certainly we ought not to attribute to the wisdom of God, that which we judge unworthy the wisdom of man. Not that I mean to speak disrespectfully of the sacred writings. I revere each book, individually, as the word of God. It is only when I consider them as forming a complete record of Christian doctrine, the sole rule of Christian faith in the reformed hypothesis, that I presume to censure; because that hypothesis appears to me to degrade them below works that are confessedly of human origin, below the thirty-nine articles of the church of England, the confessions of the church of Scotland, and the numerous systems of belief with which the Reformation has enlightened and perplexed mankind.

2d. To build your faith on the scripture alone, with security to your own conscience, it is not sufficient to *suppose*, you must *prove* that it was intended by the Spirit of God to be your only guide. Now this is impossible. The intentions of the Almighty can be known



to us through no other medium than revelation, and on this subject revelation has been silent.

3d. The scriptures bear testimony, on the very face of them, that the supposition is unfounded. God does not will or design in vain. If he had intended them to be the rule of our belief, he would have formed them so, that they might act as such a rule. But the very reverse is the case. Doctrinal points of the first importance are often expressed, by the scriptural writers, in ambiguous terms: statements, apparently contradictory, perplex the understanding of the reader; and we are ultimately compelled to rest on the conjectures of our own judgment, rather than on the decision of our rule. Can there, for example, be a question more essential to religion than this—Is Christ true God, equal to his Father, or not? Interrogate your rule of faith, and it will supply you with arguments in support of either the affirmative or the negative. If the Trinitarian produce the passages which depose in favour of the divinity of our Saviour, the Unitarian will oppose the number of texts, which appear to make him a mere creature. If Christ himself has said, “I and my Father are one,” he has also said, “The Father is greater than I.” That one of these two pas-



sages is to be expounded by the other, is evident. But which ought to have been the preference? Your rule, when it is put to the test, appears no longer to be a rule. It does not, it cannot, decide. You are, at last, compelled to determine yourself: but then it is not the scripture which is a rule to you, but you who are a rule to the scriptures. Thus again St. Paul teaches, that “man *is not* justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ:” while St. James teaches, that “by works a man *is* justified, and not by faith only.” How will you reconcile these two passages? Will you adopt the words of St. Paul, and endeavour to explain away those of St. James? Or will you prefer those of St. James, and endeavour to adapt to them those of St. Paul? In either case your rule is deficient. The true rule which you follow, is your own judgment, or rather conjecture.\* I shall con-

\* As justification by faith is “a distinguishing feature of Protestantism,” it is rather extraordinary, that its professors, after studying the only rule of faith for centuries, have not yet determined what is really meant by it. Dr. Marsh complains of the “numerous inconsistencies and contradictions in which it has, within these few years, been involved:” and shews, that the explanations which have been given of it leave hardly the shadow of a difference between the doctrine of Protestants and that of the church of Rome, (p. 51, 52). What then does he consider as sound Protestant doctrine?

tent myself with these two instances: the reader's memory will supply him with others. Were a human legislature to enact a law, containing provisions contradictory to each other, or so ambiguous as to create doubts of their real meaning, this want of precision, or of skill, would be severely condemned, and a remedy would be speedily applied. Such things, indeed, have happened. But human legislators are fallible, and, of course, liable to mistakes. God is infallible; he could not make a fallacious or defective rule. If then the scripture

---

That the faith, which justifies, is not a lively faith, or faith productive of good works; because good works cannot exist till after justification. Now, according to St. James, (ii. 26), "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is *dead* also." Are we to believe then, that a *dead* faith can give *life* to the soul? All that is required, according to Dr. Marsh, is "*repentance*, by which we forsake sin, and faith, whereby we stedfastly believe the promises of God. On forsaking sin, therefore, we are justified by faith, even before it is a lively faith," (p. 53). Now, to forsake sin, is, I presume, (for Protestant justification is a mystery I never could satisfactorily comprehend) not a mere negation, the omission of sinful action through inability, but a fixed resolution to avoid it. Such a resolution, however, is a positive act of the mind, and, if formed on proper motives, is as much a good work, in my opinion, as any act of the mind can be, after justifying faith has become, in Dr. Marsh's principles, a lively faith.

be of this description, what conclusion can we draw, but that it never was intended to serve as a rule? The source of doubt and perplexity is not in it; but in those, who, without sufficient grounds, have, of their own private authority, pronounced it to be the sole rule of Christian faith.

### CHAPTER III.

The Scriptures do not contain the whole of the unwritten Word.—The Observation of the Sunday.—The Validity of Infant-Baptism.—The Canon of the Scriptures.—Their Inspiration cannot be proved in Dr. Marsh's Supposition.—Conclusion.

---

**T**HE man, who makes it his study to investigate the revolutions of human opinion, will often be astonished to observe on how slender a foundation the most accredited systems have been raised. The whole fabric of the Reformation reposes on this one principle, that the scriptures are the only rule of Christian faith. Yet, what is this principle? The mere dictum of Luther and Melancthon. I have already shewn, that it has been assumed rather than proved, and that appearances, instead of being in its favour, depose most forcibly against it. I shall now proceed to adduce arguments, which, in my judgment at least, positively demonstrate it to be false.

One thing must be admitted on both sides, that if the apostles have left us an only rule of



faith, that rule will contain the whole doctrine and practice of Christianity. They were enjoined in the commission, which they received from their heavenly master, “to teach all nations *all things whatsoever* he had commanded them.” This, indeed, is so evident, that Dr. Marsh himself repeatedly maintains, that the *whole* doctrine of Christ and his apostles has been recorded in the scriptures of the New Testament. The Catholic, on the contrary, will assert, that the *whole* doctrine of Christ and his apostles has *not* been recorded in the scriptures of the New Testament: and, in proof of his assertion, he will appeal to the creed and practice of the church of England, which in many instances, where the scripture is deficient, has been compelled to have recourse to the authority of tradition. I shall confine myself to those instances, which have been furnished by Dr. Marsh.

The first regards the observance of the Sunday. In the decalogue, we are commanded to keep holy the sabbath day, which, I need not remind my readers, was the Saturday, or last day of the week. Now the church of England commands us to keep holy, not the Saturday, but the Sunday. That day, which God enjoins us to sanctify, she authorizes us to profane: and a day which he



allotted to profane employments, she orders us to devote to the divine worship. May I ask, on what authority she thus presumes to set aside the ordinance of God, and to act in direct defiance of the command in the scripture? I shall be told that the obligation was transferred, from one day to the other, by the authority of the apostles. So I have before learned from tradition. But tradition will not suit your purpose. If it be an ordinance of the apostles, it must be recorded in the scriptures; or, if it be not recorded there, you must admit that the *whole* of their doctrine was *not* recorded in the scriptures.

Dr. Marsh has made a feeble attempt to discover the origin of this ordinance in the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul. "It is evident," he observes, "from Acts xx. 7, and 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2, that the practice of the primitive Christians, to assemble for the purpose of worship on the *first day* of the week, in commemoration of Christ's resurrection, had the sanction of St. Paul himself. And, since this is recorded in the written word, what necessity is there for an appeal to the unwritten word."\* Now, reader, examine these two important passages, and

\* Comparative View, p. 142.

learn, how loosely the most acute logicians are compelled to reason, when they attempt to draw the whole of their religion from the scriptures alone. From both passages Dr. Marsh infers, that it was “the *practice* of the primitive Christians to assemble for the purpose of religious worship, on the first day of the week, in commemoration of Christ’s resurrection.” Unfortunately, however, that practice, which is so clear to him, is perfectly invisible to me. All that I have been able to learn from Acts xx. 7, is, that St. Paul came to Troas; that he remained there seven days; that on the first day of the week, “the disciples having been assembled to break bread,”\* (probably in the evening,) he preached to them till the next morning; that then he broke bread, and departed. Is there here any mention of “a *practice* of assembling on the first day of the week, for the purpose of religious worship, in commemoration of Christ’s resurrection?” No: mention is only made of *one* meeting, and whether that was held to com-

\* Εν δε τη μια των σαββατων συνηγμενων των μαθητων τε κλασαι αρτον. I venture to quote the original, because the English authorized translation seems to hint, rather remotely indeed, that they were accustomed to assemble on that day: “On the first day of the week, *when the disciples came together to break bread.*”

memorate Christ's resurrection, or to receive the instructions of St. Paul on the eve of his departure, we are ignorant. The latter is in itself as probable as the former: and no inference can thence be drawn of the obligation of observing the Sunday. The second passage is still less to the purpose. "Now, concerning the collection for the Saints," writes the apostle to the Corinthians, "as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings, when I come." How can these words prove the practice of assembling for religious worship on Sunday? Certainly it will not be pretended, that to put by weekly alms in private, and to assemble for the purpose of religious worship in public, are one and the same thing.

I may also observe, that Dr. Marsh, on this occasion does not attempt to meet more than one half of the difficulty. The commandment says, "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do: but the *seventh* day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God. In *it* thou shalt do no manner of work, &c." The church of England says: "On the *seventh* day, as well as the five preceding days, thou shalt la-

bour and do all that thou hast to do : but on the *first* day thou shalt do no manner of work." For this direct violation of the command of God, is there, or is there not, any warrant in the scripture? If there be, let it be produced. If there be not, as there is not, then let it be acknowledged, that the scripture does not contain the whole doctrine of the apostles, but that besides the written, must also be admitted the unwritten, word.

The second instance which has been furnished by Dr. Marsh, is that of infant baptism. The church of England, in her articles and book of Common Prayer, teaches that baptism is a sacrament, the effects of which are, " a spiritual regeneration to the remission of sin, an adoption among the children of God, and an ingrafting into the body of Christ's church."\* That Christ instituted baptism, there is sufficient evidence in the New Testament: whether he instituted it for infants as well as adults, is a question which has given rise to a long and animated controversy. The church of England orders all children to be baptized, unless there be good reason for the contrary, on the first or second Sunday next after their

\* Vide the Ministrations of Public and Private Baptism, and Art. 27.



birth: she does not order them to be re-baptized after they are grown up. Of course then she teaches the validity of infant baptism: for, according to the article, those who are grafted into the church, and adopted to be children of God, are such as “receive baptism *rightly*.”\* But where did she learn this doctrine? Certainly not from the scriptures: for it is not recorded in the scriptures. It could only be from tradition.

“But our twenty-seventh article,” observes Dr. Marsh, “is so far from resting the practice of infant baptism on the authority of *tradition*, that it places that practice on a totally different footing. The baptism of young children, says the article, is in any wise to be retained in the church, as most agreeable to the institution of Christ.”† This ought not to excite surprise. It would, indeed, have been an extraordinary oversight in the founders of the modern church of England, if, after they had rejected tradition in their sixth article, they had appealed to its authority in the twenty-seventh. But men do not always act up to their professions. It may at times be convenient to say one thing, and to do another. They had agreed to retain infant baptism: it

\* Art. 27.

† Comparative View, p. 143.

was therefore necessary to rest it on some ground. On scripture they could not: for it is not taught in scripture. On tradition they dared not: for tradition they had already rejected. The best expedient which remained, was to rest it on *its agreement with the institution of Christ*. But what is meant by this agreement? I regret that Dr. Marsh thought it foreign to the subject to explain it:\* to me such an explanation appears absolutely necessary. Does it mean that Christ really instituted infant baptism? Then they must have learned it from *tradition*. Does it mean, that after considering the subject attentively, they think it most probable that Christ intended children to be baptized? Then they acknowledge that a very important part of the doctrine of Christ has been left *unrecorded* in scripture. Indeed, on this question the framers of the thirty-nine articles found themselves placed in a very perplexing situation. It is, as they had taught, by baptism, that "men are ingrafted into the church of Christ." Now both they themselves, and the members of that church which they represented, had been baptized in their childhood. To permit then any doubt to be cast on the validity of

\* Comparative View, p. 143, note 17.

infant-baptism, was to encourage a doubt whether the new church of England was any part of the true church of Christ. Thus it became necessary to introduce infant-baptism into their creed, and at the same time to rest it on the unmeaning ground of its being "most agreeable to the institution of Christ."

As if, however, Dr. Marsh were not perfectly satisfied with his former reasoning on this subject, he proceeds "to examine it in another point of view." "As a sacrament," he observes, "has likewise (besides its efficacy) an outward and *visible* sign, the administration of it may in *this* respect be considered as a *ceremony* of the Church. Since then, the church of England uses its own *discretion* in regard to *ceremonies* . . . . we may very consistently take into consideration, that the ceremony of baptizing infants has prevailed from the earliest ages of Christianity."\* That

\* Comparative View, p. 144. Here I may be allowed to observe to Dr. Marsh, that the Catholic church also uses its own discretion in respect to ceremonies: and it was a mistake in him to suppose that traditionary usages, which have obtained the force of law, cannot be *changed* (p. 11). The church claims the authority to change them, if it think proper. And this may explain, what has so much excited the wonder of Dr. Marsh; how the Council of Trent could reject communion under both kinds, though it was conform-

a sacrament is an outward and visible sign, and must therefore be administered with some visible ceremony, is certainly true. But that has nothing to do with the present question. We are not discussing the *manner* in which baptism should be administered, but the *subject* to whom it may be administered. The baptism of an infant is, in the church of England, as much a sacrament as the baptism of an adult. Now, according to the catechism, “the sacraments have been ordained by Christ.”\* The church then is not here at liberty to use her discretion. Unless she teach that infant baptism was ordained by Christ, she can-

---

able to tradition (p. 44). The council considered the practice of receiving under one kind, or under both kinds, as a mere matter of ceremony: and this is the meaning of the words: “agnoscens hanc suam in administratione sacramentorum auctoritatem.” Neither did it, as Dr. Marsh represents, “decree as a law, what itself acknowledged to be in opposition to the *doctrine* received from the commencement of Christianity (p. 72). It did not look on it as a matter of *doctrine*, but of *ceremony*: nor did it acknowledge that even the ceremony of communicating under one kind, was in opposition to the ceremony practised from the commencement of Christianity: but only that the use of both kinds had *not been uncommon* from the commencement of Christianity: licet ab initio Christianæ religionis non infrequens utriusque speciei usus fuisset.

\* Church Catechism.



not teach that it is a sacrament;\* and if she teach, that it was ordained by Christ, she cannot, consistently with her own principles, look for the proof of it in tradition. To do so, is to confess, that the scripture does not contain the whole doctrine of Christ, and consequently is not the only rule of our faith.

3d. I shall now proceed to a subject of still greater importance. According to the church of England, the doctrines peculiar to Christianity are to be derived from no other source than the canonical books of the New Testament. But whence are we to learn, what books are, and what are not, canonical? We know that books, which in the first ages laid claim to scriptural authority, are not in the canon; such as the gospel according to the Hebrews, or according to the apostles: the memoirs by the apostles, so often quoted by Justin Martyr, and different tracts under the names of Peter, Paul, Matthias, and other apostles. We know also, that several books, the authority of which was controverted in the

\* In speaking of the sacraments in the Catholic church, Dr. Marsh tells us (p. 193, note 24) that, according to our doctrine, baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, and extreme unction, are all sacraments necessary for salvation to each individual. Where could he acquire this information?

first ages, are now in the canon; such as the Epistle of St. James, the Epistle of St. Jude, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Second Epistle of St. Peter, the second and third of St. John, and the Book of Revelations.\* Whence then did the church of England derive her canon of the New Testament? That it was not from *scripture*, is evident; but that it was from *tradition*, must be admitted on the very confession of the thirty-nine articles themselves.

In the sixth article we are told, that “in the name of the holy scriptures, are understood those canonical books of the Old and New Testament, *of whose authority was never any doubt in the church of God.*” Here the church of England, to fix the canon of the scriptures, examines what has been the doctrine of the church respecting the authority of each particular book in all former ages. If this be not an appeal to tradition, it will be difficult to point out what tradition is.

In the twentieth article, we are informed, that “the church is a witness, and a keeper of holy writ.” If it be a keeper, it must be, because God has intrusted the scriptures to its care; if it be a witness, it is because God has appointed it to bear witness to the authority

\* See Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. iii. c. 3. 24.

of the scriptures. Of course, then, it is to the testimony of this keeper of holy writ, that is, to the traditionary doctrine of the church, that we are to apply for the true canon of the scriptures.

Dr. Marsh has, however, attempted to give a different meaning to the article : “ When *we* are about to establish the *authenticity* of St. Paul’s epistles, for instance, we trace the quotations from them in ecclesiastical writers, from the present age upwards, till we come to the writers so near to the time when St. Paul lived, that the epistles ascribed to him, could not have been *falsely* ascribed without their knowing it. In this sense the church is a keeper and a witness of holy writ.”\* In this sense only? Then the article might as well have declared, that the church is the witness and keeper of every ancient writing extant, of which the author was a Christian. “ For when we are about to establish the authenticity of the works of Bede, for instance, we trace the quotations from them in ecclesiastical writers, from the present age upwards, till we come to the writers so near to the time when Bede lived, that the works ascribed to him, could not have been falsely ascribed without

\* Comparative View, p. 146.

their knowing it." In both cases the process is the same. If, in the former, it constitutes the church a keeper and a witness of the writings of Bede, or of any other ancient writer, whose name you chuse to substitute in the place of his. Truly, if this be the meaning of the declaration in the article, to insert it the creed of the church of England, was to burlesque the solemnity of doctrinal formularies, and to insult the judgment of the clergy, whose subscriptions to it are required.

But Dr. Marsh thus proceeds: "To the evidence for authenticity, which we thus obtain, the title of tradition is sometimes applied, because the evidence has been *handed down* to us from the earliest ages. But this is a tradition of *testimony*, and has no connexion whatever with a tradition of *doctrine*."\* By authenticity, is probably meant the fact, that the books of scripture were written by those whose names they bear. But it should be observed, that the sixth article speaks not of *authenticity*, but of *authority*, ("of whose *authority* was never any doubt in the church:") and authority, I presume, implies something more than mere authenticity. He who deposes to the authority of a book of scripture, deposes to

\* Comparative View, p. 146.



the inspiration of the writing, not to the name of the writer. He testifies, that it is the word of God; and, as such, is entitled to the authority which is due to the word of God. The tradition, therefore, to which the article appeals, is not a tradition of testimony, which has "no connexion whatever with a tradition of doctrine;" but a tradition of testimony, which has the most intimate connexion with doctrine. The testimony and the doctrine cannot be separated; for it is the testimony of "the witness and keeper of holy writ," teaching, that certain books are in reality, and must be received by all Christians as the word of God.

But, if nothing more than the *authenticity* of the books of scripture can be learnt from tradition, to what source will Dr. Marsh send us to discover their *inspiration*? He replies, that "the inspiration of the scriptures is a fact to which no church, whether ancient or modern, can bear *witness*. It is a fact, of which no human observation can take cognizance. It lies beyond the reach of human evidence. It can be proved only by divine testimony, and consequently by scripture alone."\* That the supernatural influence, whatever that might be,

\* Comparative View, p. 147, note 21.

which was exercised by the divine Spirit over the writers of the scriptures, was not an object of sense, is sufficiently evident; and, consequently, no church, whether ancient or modern, could bear witness to the actual perception of that influence. But this is foreign from the purpose. No church, either ancient or modern, ever advanced any such pretensions. Must we, therefore, have recourse to the scriptures themselves, for the proof of their *inspiration*? As well might we have recourse to them for the proof of their *authenticity*. If Dr. Marsh's reasoning applies in one case, it also applies in the other. For when the scriptures were completed, the writing of them by the apostle was no longer an object of sense. It was a fact, of which no human observation could then take cognizance. It was a fact, to the actual existence of which, after the deaths of the first witnesses, no church, whether ancient or modern, could bear testimony. But it will be said, that those who received from the apostles the names of the writers, might communicate their information to others, and that thus the knowledge of the fact may have been transmitted from generation to generation. Undoubtedly: but might not the apostles also inform their disciples, that the writings of the New Testament were inspired? Might not

these disciples, after the deaths of their masters, deliver the same information to the rising generation? One supposition is certainly as possible as the other; and, in this case, they would bear testimony, not to the fact of the inspiration of the scriptures, as if they had been actual witnesses of it; but to the doctrine of the inspiration of the scriptures, which doctrine they had received from the apostles. Those who believed it on such testimony, would believe it as part of the unwritten word, and of course would have sufficient foundation for their belief, though the fact itself of inspiration “lie beyond the reach of human evidence.”

But, if we allow Dr. Marsh to send us to the scriptures themselves for the proof of their inspiration, we shall, I fear, spend our labour in a very fruitless search. It is admitted, that of the New Testament the four gospels form the most valuable and important part. Yet, what is there in the scriptures to prove that these are inspired. It is not asserted by the writers themselves: it is not asserted by any of the other sacred writers. The books contain nothing, the knowledge of which necessarily pre-supposes inspiration. They are mere narratives of the actions and sayings of Christ, such as we might expect from honest

and industrious compilers. They propose hardly any point of doctrine on the authority of the writers ; and the little of this description which they contain, may have been derived from oral communication. Where then is the proof, that they are inspired writings?

If we believe the hypothesis of Dr. Marsh on the origin of the three first gospels, the proof becomes still more difficult. According to that hypothesis, the three evangelists collected their materials in a similar manner. They all procured copies of an original document, composed by some writer before them : each of these copies, in passing through different hands, had been enriched with occasional additions ; and to the additions was joined such information, as each evangelist had by his own industry collected. Thus furnished, they sat down, ignorant of each others proceedings, and formed three histories, all agreeing in many things, and all differing in some. In this there is certainly no very striking proof of inspiration. It is nothing more than the usual march of historians, who, to their own personal knowledge, are anxious to add whatever traditionary information, written or oral, they may be able to procure. Such writings are not like the writings of the ancient pro-



phets. These foretel, in the name of the Almighty, future events; and the accomplishment of their predictions is a proof of their claim to inspiration. But the three evangelists narrate only the actions and prophecies of another. They shew, indeed, if the hypothesis be true, the high estimation in which they held tradition; they prove, that even *then* it was considered a legitimate source of religious knowledge: but, as for any claim to inspiration for themselves, they neither make it, nor furnish evidence on which it may be founded.

Dr. Marsh observes, that St. Matthew was an apostle; that, of course, whatever he wrote, obtained the sanction of an apostle, and must be considered as apostolic doctrine. Allowing this for the present, I will only ask, what is to become of the gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke? These evangelists were not apostles; they could not impart the apostolic sanction to their own writings; nor does the scripture say that it was imparted to them by any of the apostles. If then the claim of inspiration can be proved from scripture only, their works must be excluded from the number of the inspired writings, and reckoned among the most ancient sources of traditionary doctrine.

Whatever has been said of the gospel of St.

Luke,\* will equally apply to his other work, the Acts of the Apostles. That also must be expunged from the canon of the scriptures, and thus we shall be deprived at once of one third of the New Testament.

But it is unnecessary to descend to particular works, when Dr. Marsh's principle equally affects the whole collection. It takes away the proof of inspiration altogether. For how can the scriptures prove their own inspiration? It is on their inspiration that all their doctrinal authority depends. You must shew that they are inspired, before you can deduce a single point of doctrine from their testimony. If, in attempting to demonstrate the inspiration of any book, you pre-suppose its inspiration, you fall into a *petitio principii*; you take for granted what you have undertaken to prove. If you do not pre-suppose its inspiration, then its testimony on that point is

\* Indeed Dr. Marsh himself, in his "Illustration of the Hypothesis," p. 27, refers to *tradition* for a proof of the *authority* of the gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke. In regard to their "*authority*, the hypothesis leaves those gospels in full possession of the sanction, to which the early fathers appealed in their behalf: namely, that the gospel of St. Mark was approved by the apostle St. Peter, and the gospel of St. Luke by the apostle St. Paul." And still he appears, in p. 49, to consider these testimonies of the fathers to be little better than reports.

of no more authority than the testimony of any profane or ecclesiastical writer. Its claim to inspiration is not to be admitted, because it has been advanced: it must be made good by proof more convincing than its own assertion. When our blessed Lord declared himself to be the son of the Most High, he did not require the Jews to believe him on his mere word: he appealed to his miracles which proved the truth of his words. "If I had not done among them," says he, "the works which none other man did, they had not had sin." When the apostles proclaimed themselves the ministers of the Messiah, it was by the wonders which they worked, that they proved the truth of their pretensions. "The Lord," says St. Mark, "working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." To prove then the inspiration of the scriptures, you must derive your proof from some other source than the scriptures themselves.—In short, according to Dr. Marsh, inspiration is "a fact which can be proved only by divine testimony:" consequently then, as the scriptures, till you have shewn them to be inspired, cannot be considered as divine testimony, they cannot be taken to prove their own inspiration.

Nor will it better the case, to have recourse

to what Dr. Marsh ingeniously stiles the “tradition of testimony;” the historic evidence that the books of scripture were written by those whose names they bear. Whether this be certain or not, matters little. The preceding reasoning will apply again. The inspiration of the writing, or of the writer, is the same thing. If the testimony of the scripture cannot, as has been shewn, prove its own inspiration, it cannot prove the inspiration of those who wrote it.

Perhaps it may be said that the writers appear, from the tradition of testimony, to have been the apostles of Christ: that they were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; that they could not teach a false doctrine; and that of course their writings must have been inspired. But whence is all this information obtained? If from the tradition of testimony, it is then false that the inspiration of the scripture can be proved from scripture only: if from the scripture, then you must prove its inspiration, before you can exact the belief of the reader to such assertions. Hence I conclude that, to determine the canon or the inspiration of the scripture from the scripture alone, is impracticable: the knowledge of both must be derived from *tradition*.

These instances (more, were it necessary,



might be adduced), will suffice to shew, that even the founders of the church of England, how fiercely soever they might disclaim against the authority of tradition, were unable to frame their own creed without recourse to its assistance; and may satisfy the impartial reader, that the New Testament, though it be the word of God, was not composed with the view of furnishing one sole and entire rule of Christian faith. Here then I may venture to call the attention of Dr. Marsh to the inquiry, which I suggested at the commencement of this tract. Have not the reformed churches, by rejecting the authority of tradition, destroyed in effect the authority of scripture, taken away the certainty of religious belief, and undermined the very foundations of Christianity? For—

1st, If the foregoing observations are well-founded, the written does not contain the whole of the unwritten word. Those then, who derive their religious opinions from the written word only, can have no security that they profess “all things whatsoever Christ commanded his apostles” to teach.

2d, By rejecting the authority of tradition, they have rejected the only rational means of proving the inspiration of the scriptures. Now, unless the scriptures be inspired, their

authority is of no higher order than that of other ancient writings. No doctrine can, with security, be drawn from them. So far are they from being the only rule of faith, that they become no rule at all.

3d, But if the unwritten word have no authority, and the written word be deprived of its claim to inspiration, what is to be the fate of Christianity? It will remain without any support. It will not have where to rest its foot.

4th, Christianity is not a confused mass of opinions and conjectures, but a regular system of revealed doctrine, to which our blessed Lord requires a full and sincere assent. When he delivered their commission to his apostles, he bade them teach all things whatsoever he had commanded them, and denounced the severest punishment against the man who should refuse to believe. Now it appears to me, independently of the foregoing consideration, impossible for any one, on Protestant grounds, to acquire such a knowledge of these doctrines, as to be warranted in giving to them a full and sincere assent:—and *that* for this reason, that the doctrines of scripture are susceptible of various and opposite interpretations. A code of law, which should be differently explained in every court,

could not be deemed a law proper for the regulation of our conduct; and a rule of faith, which has a different meaning in every province, I had almost said, in every family, cannot be a rule to determine our belief. To deny that the doctrines of scripture are susceptible of different interpretations, would be to give the lie to the experience of nearly three centuries, and to seal our eyes against all that is passing around us. For whence, if not from this source, have arisen all those discordant opinions, those contradictory creeds, those races of fanatics, that have distinguished and disgraced the Reformation? The principle, that the scripture is the only rule of faith, gave birth to all this confusion. From the moment that it was established, the flood-gates of error and folly were thrown open: each enthusiast was raised into an apostle: and every doctrine, which had formerly been deemed essential to Christianity, was exposed to doubt and cavil. Nor did the mischief end here. If the reformers spurned the authority of the Catholic church, venerable as she was with the hoar of ages; their disciples in their turn have, with still greater reason, spurned the authority of their upstart fathers. They have divided and subdivided themselves into sects without number: and of those, who are

still held together by a *nominal* assent to certain articles, the greater part are indifferent to their meaning, and the rest explain them, some in one sense and some in another. All appeal equally to the scriptures: hosts of texts are marshalled in hostile array against each other; and the word of God is made to say and unsay, to prove and disprove, whatever may seem proper to the opposite parties.

Nor let it be said, that these differences of opinion are confined to matters of little consequence. It is not for matters, which they think of little consequence, that men separate from communion with each other. Nor can it be of little consequence to determine, whether there are three persons, or only one person, in God: whether Christ be truly God, or a mere creature; whether he suffered death to atone for the sins, or to leave an example for the conduct of man; whether the baptism of children be valid or invalid; whether "the office of bishops hath any warrant, ground, or authority in scripture; or," as is asserted by the church of Scotland, "hath been brought in by the folly and corruption of men's inventions, to the great overthrow of the kirk of God."\*

On all these, and on many other subjects, the

\* Arts. of Gen. Assembly at Dundee, 1580, Sess. iv. 2.



affirmative and negative have been maintained in the numerous creeds of the reformed churches. Certainly then, it must be confessed that the scriptures are susceptible of various interpretations; and that, to be made a rule of truth and not of error, they must be explained by some authority, from whose decision their can be no appeal.

But does there exist any such authority under the Reformation? If we may believe the church of England, there does. Its founders, anxious to restrain licentiousness of opinion among their followers, decreed in the twentieth article, that "*the church hath authority in controversies of faith.*" This was a bold and dangerous measure. It was an act of self-condemnation; as it legalized the sentence, which had been pronounced against them by the Catholic church, when they began to dogmatize. It was an act of tyranny over their disciples: as it took from those disciples the right of private judgment, at the very moment it was exercised by their teachers. To exercise or justify, in this respect, the fathers of their faith, has long been a difficult task for the divines of the church of England. Dr. Marsh is dissatisfied with the attempts of his predecessors. To inquire, whether his labours have been more success-

ful, would lead me from the present subject. It is sufficient for me, that he explains the meaning of the article to be, that, when the sense of scripture is disputed, the authority which is to determine the controversy, resides in the church. Thus, he adds, "*at the time of the Reformation, the sense of scripture with regard to various doctrines was disputed. The convocation, therefore, which is our highest judicial authority in spiritual concerns, as the judges are our highest judicial authority in temporal concerns, assembled and determined, in the name of the church which it represented, what the sense of scripture, in regard to the disputed points, really was.*"\*

But here, it will not be impertinent to inquire whence the convocation derived its authority to determine what the sense of scripture *really was*. From the church which it represented? That church might indeed engage to acquiesce in the decision: but such engagement would not prove that the convocation had authority to determine the *real* sense of scripture: it would merely prove that the members of the church, unable to understand the meaning of their only rule of faith, were fain to substitute in its place the interpretation

\* Comparative View, p. 164.

of men as fallible as themselves. Was it then from the state? The state has nothing to do with the truth or falsehood of religious opinion. It may, indeed, delegate certain persons to form a doctrinal code, which shall intitle its professors to civil honours and civil emoluments; but it cannot invest them with the power to discover, nor consequently with the authority "to determine, what the sense of scripture *really* is." The comparison between the convocation and the judges, does not hold. The legislature makes the laws, and may appoint the judges to expound them; the legislature did not write the scriptures, nor can it impart to others the right to decide on their *true* meaning.

But, does this authority, to determine what the sense of scripture really is, reside in the convocation of the church of England *alone*? No: "*the Protestants of Germany, (says Dr. Marsh) acted in the same manner with respect to the confession of Augsburgh; the Protestants of Switzerland acted in the same manner with respect to the Helvetic confession; the Protestants of Holland acted in the same manner with respect to the confession of Dordrecht; and so must all churches act, without exception.*"\* To make this enumeration more

\* Comparative View, p. 165.

complete, there might also have been noticed the two confessions of the Protestants of Scotland, the two confessions of the Protestants of France, the two confessions of the Protestants of Poland, the five confessions of the Protestants of Switzerland, and the confessions, without number, of the Protestants of Germany. In all these confessions was determined what the sense of scripture *really* was, and all were issued by the authority of synods or convocations. Were then the determinations all alike? No: almost always different, frequently contradictory. The *real* sense of scripture constantly varied with the standard of local orthodoxy. It was one thing in England, another in Scotland, a third at Augsburg, and so in rotation. This variation alone is a sufficient proof, that they were not competent to determine the real sense of the scripture. They might, indeed, publish to the world their own collective opinions, and leave it to the judgment of their disciples to adopt them or not. But if they pretended to any thing more, they arrogated to themselves an authority, to which they had no claim; and violated the first and favourite principle of the Reformation, by adding to the word of God their own fallible interpretation as a rule of faith.

If then, to determine what is the real sense



of scripture, is beyond the competence of synods, does it belong to each individual? 1st. This right of private judgment, so universally claimed in the reformed churches, receives no countenance from the sacred apostles. They teach that it is the duty of private individuals to obey, not their privilege to judge. 2d. It is a claim devoid of probability. For it is idle to expect from the sagacity of individuals, what is above the wisdom of synods and convocations. 3d. It is contradicted by our knowledge of human nature. For the great majority of mankind are evidently unequal to the task: and the best and wisest of men, when they reflect how liable they are to error on other subjects, and that their opinions on this are opposed by the opinions of numbers equal in judgment to themselves, must learn to distrust their own determinations, and be content to rely on conjecture, rather than on certainty. 4th. It is, as has been already shewn, the parent of fanaticism and error. It has called in question, or perverted every dogma of Christianity. It yearly multiplies sects, and invents doctrines. To its partizans may be transferred, what was said by an ancient writer of the sages of pagan Greece: that no opinion can be imagined so absurd, as not to have been taught by some of these pretended apostles.

But if neither the judgment of individuals, nor the decision of synods, can determine with certainty the *real* sense of the scripture in the reformed churches, it may be fairly inferred, that the scripture *alone* is not to them a certain rule of faith; and that those who admit no other rule, cannot possess any rational security, that their religious creed is perfectly conformable to the doctrine of our Saviour.

In conclusion, should their occur in the preceding pages any expression which may be deemed disrespectful to the books of the New Testament, let it once more be remembered, that it was employed in arguing on the hypothesis of my adversaries. It is my conviction, that each of these books was written under the superintendence of the divine Spirit, and is to be received as the word of God; but, at the same time, I am persuaded, that, to hold up these occasional tracts as the whole, and only rule of religious belief, is to exhibit them in a light, derogatory from the wisdom of the deity, and injurious to the cause of Christianity.

## APPENDIX.

**I**N my "Review of certain Anticatholic Publications," I had made some remarks on the third canon of the fourth council of Lateran. As these have been noticed by Dr. Marsh, I may be allowed once more to return to that subject.

Dr. Marsh maintains, 1st. that the provisions of the canon include all who dissent from the church of Rome at the present day, as well as in former ages; and, 2d. that they include sovereigns, such as the King of England, no less than feudatory lords.

On the first head he complains, that I have inserted in my translation of the canon, the word "Albigenses," which does not occur in the original. I must reply, that the passage in my tract was not meant for a translation, but for a summary of the meaning of the canon. The word "Albigenses" is, indeed, not to be found in the original: but the words "*hæc*

*hæretica fœditas*," are to be found there. Now the *hæc hæretica fœditas* appeared to me to be the errors previously condemned in the first and second canons, viz. those of the Albigen-  
 ses, and of Almaric and Joachim: and, as the two latter had but few followers, and as the design of the framers of the canon, if we may believe historians, was to put down the Albigenses, I did not conceive I should distort the meaning of the original by making use of that word. If Dr. Marsh object, that by *hæc hæretica fœditas* should be understood "*universi hæretici, quibuscunque nominibus censeantur*:" (Ibid).—I might answer, that these very words are to be explained by those immediately preceding, "*adversus hanc sanctam, orthodoxam, catholicam fidem, quam superius exposuimus*:" or that they could only include the different sects, which existed at the time. But the point is not worth discussion: for, if the church ever possessed any inherent right to make such a law against one sect, it must still possess it against another. The truth, however, is, that it never possessed it: and this we have declared to be our belief upon our oaths. If, then, it can be shewn, that councils have issued decrees trenching upon temporal rights, we say that these decrees possessed no authority without the concurrence of the tem-



poral power. In the states of the Pope, and of those bishops, who were temporal princes, they might be immediately put in execution: in others they were of no avail.

On the second head, to prove that the canon included sovereigns, Dr. Marsh appeals to the words, *sæculares potestates, quibuscunque fungantur officiis*, than which he observes, no expression can be more general, (p. 221.) But “*potestates*,” in the language of that age, meant not sovereigns, but those magistrates to whom was intrusted the *power* of executing the laws: and its Italian representative “*potesta*,” still retains the same signification. This is also plain from the accompanying words, *quibuscunque fungantur officiis*: and from the parallel passage in the constitution of Frederic, “*potestates, consules, seu rectores, quibuscunque fungantur officiis*.” This emperor proceeds to impose on them the obligation of taking the prescribed oath, under the penalty of removal from office, and the revocation of all the judgments which they may pronounce: *alioquin nec pro potestatibus nec pro consulibus habeantur, et eorum sententias ex tunc irritas declaramus et inanes*.” Certainly, no man can think that the *potestates*, with respect to whom Frederic could publish such a law, were independent sovereigns.

Dr. Marsh urges, moreover, the clause, "*eadem nihilominus servata circa eos qui non habent dominos principales.*"—"For, surely," he observes, "lords, who have no principals, must themselves be principal lords," (p. 220.) That, however, they were not sovereigns, is evident; for the constitution of Frederic could only include subjects, and yet it includes, "*eos, qui non habent dominos principales.*" Indeed, it is hardly possible that the council could have meant sovereigns by such a designation. To describe them in an official document by the term of "persons not having principal lords," would have been as extraordinary, as if his present majesty were to be described in an act of parliament by the stile of "one not having a principal lord in the united kingdom." Dr. Marsh, however, is unwilling that the expression should mean the possessors of frank-allodial property: and draws a distinction between *tenere a domino principali*, and *habere dominum principalem*. But the distinction is imaginary, when these expressions regard the tenure of land. *Tenere a domino principali ratione soli*, and *habere dominum principalem ratione soli*, mean the same thing. Now this is the case in the canon, which deprives the delinquent of his land, whether he hold it of a superior lord, or not: but,

in the first case, reserves the right of the superior lord, which in the second it could not.

In copying the constitution of Frederic, I am accused by Dr. Marsh of two mistakes: of having substituted *principalis* for *temporalis* in one place, and of having omitted *temporalis* in another. The quotation was procured for me by a friend, nor was I then aware that the constitution had been differently printed by different editors. I have since learned, that in the edition of Goldastus, Francof. ad Mœn. 1615, the passages are printed as they are cited by Dr. Marsh: but that in the Corpus Juris Civilis, Parisiis, 1576; and, in Dupin, De antiqua eccl. disciplina, Par. 1686, p. 575, they are printed as they have been cited by me. The difference, however, in the words will make no difference in the reasoning: and, as far as I can judge, the reading which I have followed, is the better: as it is more intelligible, is conformable to that of the canon, and is perfectly accordant with the jurisprudence of the age.

Before I leave this subject, I may observe, that a decree of the council of Trent, quoted by Dr. Marsh, will, perhaps, throw some light upon it. It is the nineteenth of the twenty-fifth session, and was made against those who *assigned* places in their domains for public

duels, not those who merely “suffered duelling,” as Dr. Marsh represents it: *qui locum ad monomachiam in terris suis inter Christianos concesserint*. It deprives them of their jurisdiction and domain in that place, if they hold it of the church, “*quod ab ecclesia obtinent:*” and adds, “*si feudalia sint, directis dominis statim acquirentur.*” From this distinction, it is not improbable that those, who in the canon of the Lateran council are described as not having principal lords, were those who held their lands immediately of the church.

Much of the remainder of Dr. Marsh’s reasoning, in this chapter, is novel and interesting. 1st. He denies that there is any distinction between the obligation of canons relating to discipline, and the obligation of canons relating to doctrines: and asserts, that the Irish Catholic clergy, on their appointment to benefices, swear to the observance of both. This is rather extraordinary: since, it is a well-known fact, that in five of the Irish dioceses, and the wardinate of Galway, the discipline of the council of Trent has never been received. Are the clergy of these dioceses to be considered as perjured? But on what does Dr. Marsh found his opinion? On these words of their oath. *Cœtera item omnia a sacris canonibus, et œcumenicis conciliis, ac præcipue*



a sacrosancta tridentina synodo tradita, definita, et declarata, indubitantes recipio atque profiteor. Here is not one word regarding discipline. The words tradita, definita, declarata, are so many technical terms, if I may so call them, regarding doctrine. The instrument itself is a profession of the Catholic doctrine, *professio fidei*, and in the very sentence immediately following the passage quoted by Dr. Marsh, it is called *hanc veram catholicam fidem*.

Dr. Marsh's next discovery is still more extraordinary. "There cannot be a doubt," he tells us, "that *ordine*," (in the clause, *salvo meo ordine*, inserted in the oath taken by Catholic bishops) means, "*ordine monastico*." In taking an oath of obedience to the Pope, "It was deemed necessary to stipulate, that such obedience (for it seldom happened that a man was consecrated bishop, who had not previously belonged to some monastic order), should not prejudice the privileges of his own order." (p. 236, note.) It will certainly excite a smile in Catholic prelates, who never belonged to any monastic institute, to be told that they have upon oath professed themselves monks. But the mistake may be excused in a writer, who is not acquainted with the peculiar language of Catholics. When a bishop speaks of his own order, he understands his order in the hierarchy,

—the episcopal order : and the words, *salvo meo ordine*, mean, *saving what becomes the character and rights of a Christian bishop*. No one ever pretended, as Dr. Marsh supposes, that this clause was lately “inserted, for the purpose of saving allegiance to the kings of England. It is probably as ancient as the oath itself: but it shows, that the bishop is bound by his oath to nothing repugnant to the episcopal character, and consequently to nothing inconsistent with his allegiance.\*

But the most amusing of all these discoveries, is, the creation of an independent “poppedom” in Russia, “by a master-piece of policy in the Empress Catherine,” (p. 245, 249.) Let Dr. Marsh, however, revert to the sources from which he derived his information, and he will then learn, what he seems to have overlooked, that the courts of Petersburg and Rome, understood each other in this transaction: that the Russian government has an agent at Rome for the expedition of ecclesiastical business: that if the Empress erected Mohilow into an archiepiscopal see, on her side, the Pope erected

\* Will Dr. Marsh condescend to review what he has written, p. 240, and say, whether he has not, inadvertently, attributed to the expressions of the Irish Archbishops, a meaning most foreign from that which those expressions naturally convey?

it into one also on his: that if she named Stanislaus Tsches Tschersovich to that dignity, the Pope gave him the usual faculties of institution: that the Nuncio Archetti invested him with the pallium, and that he took the usual oath of obedience to the Pope, in the presence, and with the approbation of the Empress. Yes: this very Russian Pope swore that obedience to the Roman Pope, which Dr. Marsh declares cannot be done but “at expense of fealty to the sovereign;” and swore it too before the whole Russian court, and with the approbation of that princess, who, as Dr. Marsh also informs us, “was one of the most profound politicians that ever sat upon a throne!!”

THE END.









